

EXPLORING THE NATURE OF REALITY IN SCIENCE FICTION  
THROUGH THE USE OF TAOISM AND  
ADVAITA VEDANTA

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EXPLORING THE NATURE OF REALITY IN SCIENCE FICTION  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*To transform the world, we must begin with ourselves; and what is important in beginning with ourselves is the intention. The intention must be to understand ourselves and not to leave it to others to transform themselves or to bring about a modified change through revolution, either of the left or of the right. It is important to understand that this is our responsibility, yours and mine.*

–Jiddu Krishnamurti

The protagonists in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* and Vandana Singh's *Distances* become unhinged from their world through a loss of identity. They experience a mental shift that they believe is a dislocation, but is ultimately a relocation of a *true* self. Through the recognition of reality as an illusion, the main characters discover an autonomy that allows them to choose how they view their world and themselves in it. Self in this argument refers to the individual getting in touch with her personal aspirations and principles. A true self refers to a self-assigned identity that eases the tension between the internal desires and external demands put upon the individual. *High Castle* and *Distances* focus on what can be appreciated in imperfect society. The use of a non-dual philosophical outlook assists these authors in cognitive dislocation, and offers the characters the possibility of viewing reality in a different way through a change in their own perspective.

While many novels critique political, social, economic, reproductive, or other

common divisive issues in the contemporary world, the novels of Dick and Singh push a little further. Their novels investigate not only division as constructed and categorization as inherent to communication, but they aim to subvert binaries in general, in preference for hybridity and polyphony. Dick and Singh look at the construction of reality and what lies beyond reality as it is known. Through their use of philosophies that utilize the idea of reality as an illusion, these authors investigate the nature of reality. *The Man in the High Castle* and *Distances* examine the construction of existence and what remains upon recognition of this bleak fact. These works suggest a way to live through awareness and acceptance of the boundaries of existence. The pervasive duality in Western society asks citizens to make value judgments concerning everything. One thing is typically above another: good above evil, lightness preferred to dark, and the superior status given to a man as opposed to a woman in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, even mixture is generally viewed as an impurity, rather than a fact of life. Objects and people are divided in a society by classifications such as economic status, class, race, or gender, and these divisions somehow seem natural. Since the mind makes judgments through language even prior to being cognitive of what judgment is being made (through inherent language-based compartmentalization), human cognition automatically thinks by way of limitations and definitions. The authors being discussed in this thesis use features from philosophies based in non-dualism to critique dualistic thought in general (such as sane vs. insane, truth vs. illusion, and outside vs. inside). Dick and Singh suggest a broad conceptualization of the world that appreciates and acknowledges diversity, but questions systematic value-based categorization and institutionalized inequality.

*High Castle* and *Distances* set up binaries to break them, use various religious



myths that suggest that appreciation of diversity is preferable to homogenized stasis, and include aspects specifically from the *Tao Te Ching* and the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta such as inaction or flexibility. David Loy, in *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, describes the relation between Taoism and Advaita Vedanta, and their various tenets. The main discussion in Loy's work focuses on how both philosophies describe a non-dual experience (42). The *Tao Te Ching* and the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta mention a path to inner liberation through recognition of the constructed categories of the mind. Dick and Singh imagine worlds aware or suspect of inherent, arbitrary hierarchies of value.<sup>1</sup> Their characters develop perspectives that suggest they construct their own worlds. The characters in these novels possess the ability to adopt a different way of viewing the world, and in so doing, become aware that they construct their own reality.

Dick and Singh utilize non-dualist philosophy because such philosophy in particular includes both a world of duality and the suggestion of a complete oneness. The completeness of one aspect in the non-dual binary structure also allows these works to subvert binaries in general by containing everything, even the binary of which it is a part. Therefore, this philosophy allows these works to function outside a binary structure through the use of the ultimate binary of non-dualism. *The Man in the High Castle* and *Distances* use non-dual philosophy to move beyond post-modernism, toward a recognition, appreciation, and reconfiguration of the boundaries of reality. The inclusion of Taoist and Advaitic philosophy in *High Castle* and *Distances* is not simply an aesthetic that lends itself to estrangement, but the novels' overall message is influenced by the

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<sup>1</sup> In Vandana Singh's *Of Love and Other Monsters*, she explores similar suspicions about binaries and constructions like gender.

tenets of these philosophies. Dick and Singh's characters progress toward a non-dual perspective—a recognition of the parts that make up a whole—that suggests a completeness. The characters experience a self-contained revolution in which their world may not change, but their understanding of themselves within it will change and grow immensely. The inclusion of non-dual philosophy may function as an ontological frame for these novels, but also lends a totality to these works that takes into account an ambiguous outlook on the world that does not render its aspects merely good or bad. The characters recognize a wider perspective on and appreciation for their reality as it is. The characters' discoveries do not depend on their worlds as much as on their perspectives.

This thesis will demonstrate that the worlds of these novels suggest a veil of reality wherein the characters seek out truth as defined by philosophies based on non-duality. The characters work toward recognition of an immanent oneness, and the acceptance of the need for both the illusion and the true, ever-present reality to exist. *High Castle* and *Distances* suggest self-growth and appreciation for hybridity and diversity in a society. The philosophical tenets of balance and inaction are also at odds with the Western concept of progress through action and initiative. Dick and Singh use the elements of non-dual philosophy to imagine a reality that does not require identification through rejection.

Philosophical works such as the *Tao* are also based in practical application toward the betterment of human society through individual improvement (self-realization) with chapters entitled “Taoist philosophy in leadership, education, government, and war” (*The Book of Tao*). Many theorists, upon studying the message of inaction in the *Tao*, have pronounced it despairing nihilism wherein life has no meaning, so citizens remain

immobile and are thereby unable to change their situation. On the contrary, Taoist philosophy has maintained the importance of proper duty through individual responsibility while recognizing that to free oneself mentally is still the most valid form of everlasting satisfaction in a mutable society. As Stephen Mitchell writes in his foreword to his translation of the *Tao Te Ching*:

The misperception [of the *Tao* as despairing] may arise from [Lao-tzu's] insistence on *wei wu wei*, literally 'doing not-doing,' which has been seen as passivity. Nothing could be further from the truth. A good athlete can enter a state of body-awareness in which the right stroke or the right movement happens by itself, effortlessly, without any interference of the conscious will. This is a paradigm for non-action: the purest and most effective form of action. The game plays the game; the poem writes the poem; we can't tell the dancer from the dance. (vii-viii)

In this sense, inaction is a natural response to action—a passive approach to change that accepts and thereby appreciates it.

History seems to be a constant of returns or a pendulum swing from one ideology to another. The works here demonstrate that there are no sweeping panaceas, only the ability to flow with the world:

Those who organize into distinct societies with banners and slogans. . . .  
 [T]hat is a reduction into the past, however revolutionary these slogans may be. . . . After all, there has always been in history movements of people organized in opposition to the governing powers. This is merely one group using force against another, the outs vs. the ins. It has failed to

produce a utopia so far. And . . . it always will. (*Shifting Realities* 191)

Dick's above quotation demonstrates how belief systems based in an *us vs. them* mentality divide society rather than foster community. Dick and Singh wish to show the value of self-awareness and personal responsibility as opposed to a world unified through constructed divisions. Their works appreciate the human being as a mix of characteristics which singular definitions or neat categorizations do not fit. By delving into what lies beyond reality as humanity knows it, these authors explore the truly autonomous human being freed by their attempts to subvert binaries. The awareness they gain is through the knowledge of the false boundaries that hem them in. Civilization is flawed to each human perspective because there are too many competing interests to ever have complete balance, true freedom, or anything that resembles everlasting peace. So the one individual mind views reality in opposition to the other minds. Human desire cannot exist in an immutable society; all people would be required to desire the exact same things. The non-dual awareness suggested in the philosophies of Advaita Vedanta and Taoism recognizes that society will never be ideal because that would be a kind of death—existence in one state alone.

Although Dick's *High Castle* and Singh's *Distances* use various aspects of Taoism or Advaita Vedanta, each philosophy attempts to allow the individual to live more true to herself within society. Often stories from the *Bhagavad Gita* or Taoist tales (like Chuang Tse and the butterfly) were meant to capture the awareness of an ultimate reality through parable as the concept itself was boundless and therefore could not be put into words as such. Parables are often used in this way to hint at something esoteric (e.g. the Upanishads). *High Castle* and *Distances* do not argue that truth is preferable to illusion,

but demonstrate that both are integral to existence. Taoism and Advaita Vedanta appreciate the flaws in the empirical world through recognition of its ephemeral and perceived nature: “for the Advaitan every sense perception is really the restoration of the basic identity between the knower and the known, and the allowing of basic reality, i.e., consciousness, to reveal itself immediately” (Loy 61). Non-dual philosophy appreciates the illusion of reality for its artful craft and recognizes suffering as largely a product of the mind. Dick humorously describes this enjoyment of illusory existence as “the veil of maya, your special effects department . . . [which] can now simulate anything the mind can imagine . . . and you thought it was all real” (*Shifting Realities* 103). In the theory of Indian philosophical non-dualism, the veiled illusion of reality (maya) in which humanity lives and the unknowable oneness of immanent reality (Nirguna Brahman) that always exists behind the illusion thus making the illusion possible, are combined, “coupling the real and the unreal” where “the object of the notion of the ego, and the interior Self is well known to exist on account of its immediate (intuitive) presentation” (Radhakrishnan and Moore 509-10).

True consciousness or self as depicted by Advaitic philosophy *is* and always will *be*, although one cannot be cognitive of it while existing solely as self. Loy articulates the non-cognitive ability of pure being: “[o]ne mind is what you see before you if you do not reason about it” (60). Therefore, both false reality and the underlying true reality exist simultaneously, which is sometimes called superimposition: “to describe the relation between the initial sensation and the succeeding thought-constructions of recognition and volitional reaction. . . . Sankara . . . uses [this term] to describe the 'relation' between Brahman and the phenomenal world” (Loy 65). The projected reality of maya that can be

hypothesized about or altered is pervaded by the true reality of the complete self (Brahman), which can only be assumed or implied, but never altered: “Sankara claims that our perception of the universe is a continuous perception of Brahman” or self (Loy 60). Self is described as in the background as all of humanity acts out its constructed dramatics, so “the Advaitans view immediacy as the basic character of the absolute Consciousness, of which the knower, the known, and the process or mechanism of knowledge are apparent differentiations due to ignorance” (Loy 60). The suggestion is that the limited cognitive capabilities of the human mind are the reason that the individual views things and people as different from oneself. The worlds of *High Castle* and *Distances* are truly directed at an awareness of the mutability and constructed nature of reality as humanity knows it, rather than a cure for anything deemed “bad” which is in itself an individual value judgment that cannot be made on a wide scale for all human beings. The concept of self in these non-dual philosophies allows these works to subvert binaries through the recognition of an *a priori* state.

In the Advaitic tradition, self is not defined by any referent to anything else, meaning it does not seek identity through binary opposition, but is rather an implied identity. Reality as an illusion here means the concept of maya, a dream of reality projected infinitely by the fixed state rather than any reality constructed by a system or dominant population to keep humanity functioning for its own purposes (e.g. The Wachowski siblings' *The Matrix*). Non-dualism utilizes the concept of a transcendental reality combined with a constructed reality that satisfies the need for constancy, stasis, and flux—attributing the ephemeral world with meaning through its juxtaposition alongside an enduring reality. In Advaita Vedanta:

The world has no separate existence apart from Brahman[,] . . . the ultimate, transcendent and immanent God of the latter Vedas[,] . . . The experiencing self (jīva) and the transcendental self of the Universe (ātman) are in reality identical (both are Brahman), though the individual self seems different as space within a container seems different from space as such. These cardinal doctrines are represented in the anonymous verse ‘brahma satyam jagan mithya; jīvo brahmaiva na aparah’ (Brahman is alone True, and this world of plurality is an error; the individual self is not different from Brahman). Plurality is experienced because of error in judgments (mithya) and ignorance (avidya). Knowledge of Brahman removes these errors and causes liberation. (Menon)

Interestingly, “this claim is by no means unique to Vedānta; it is found in virtually all the Asian philosophies” (Loy 27). Loy goes on to explain that this pervasive state is the main suggestion that underlies the *Tao Te Ching*. He explains that while the *Tao* is less direct in its definition of a pervasive self, the hint is there as it asserts a third sense (non-duality) that would make imperative the two realities of constancy and change that allow for the third sense. Loy further references passages that suggest an ineffable state: “There is something mysterious, without beginning, without end, that existed before the heavens and earth . . . [It is] never changing . . . Tao is a vast immeasurable void . . . used to infinity; it is truly inexhaustible . . . like a prelude to nature, a preface to God” (*Tao Te Ching* 7).

Now that it is understood how these philosophies function and their relation to

one another, I will discuss the purpose of their inclusion within *High Castle* and *Distances*. The protagonist's world is not driven by a desire for possessions or power; rather they seek a greater understanding of themselves to the benefit of the world in general. These characters are often individuals who gain a greater self-knowledge within their own society, not some foreign realm. What can be gleaned from these works is that they do not simply critique society, either our contemporary one or another plausible society; *High Castle* and *Distances* examine human dissatisfaction in general at the root—the dissatisfied person, the unstable individual who, no matter if society is utopian or bankrupt, cannot find their peace. These types of works can further be thought of as potentially advocating a conceptualization of reality as non-dualistic. The central character in these stories,

By the practice of ethical virtues and by the pursuit of devotion and knowledge reach[es] the goal of self-realization (*moksa*). *Moksa* (self-realization or freedom) is the direct realization of the truth which has been there from eternity. On the attainment of freedom nothing happens to the world; only [their] view of it changes. (Radhakrishnan and Moore 507)

The non-dual philosophy that Dick specifically includes in his works suggests a “philosophical *Taoism*, as opposed to religious *Taoism*, [that] draws on the thinking generally attributed to Lao Tzu, especially as it is found in the *Tao Te Ching*, and the philosophy and anecdotes of Chuang T[se]” (Craig 112). Mitchell translates the *Tao Te Ching* as:

*The Book of the Immanence of the Way* or *The Book of the Way of How It Manifests Itself in the World* . . . [which is a] classic manual on the art of



living, written in style of gemlike lucidity[,] . . . [and] it is clear from [Lao-tzu's] teachings that he deeply cared about society, if society means the welfare of one's fellow human beings. (vii)

As previously mentioned, the basis for the Tao is action through non-action. This concept is commonly misinterpreted as impotence. As Huang states, “[t]he central tenet of Daoism, *inaction*, is particularly vulnerable to being cast as weakness or failure; after all, the unwillingness or inability to *act* in a society that encourages action and activism above all else can only be portrayed as a pathological disorder” (Huang 28).<sup>2</sup> Mitchell notes that when one follows the Way, “[n]othing is done because the doer has wholeheartedly vanished into the deed . . . This 'nothing' is, in fact, everything” (viii). Erik Craig states, “this Nothingness is far from anything like philosophical nihilism” (Craig 127). Some aspects important to this argument are those of balance, inaction, and softness. By softness, the *Tao* is referring to “the opposite of rigidity[,] . . . adaptability, [or] endurance” (Mitchell viii). The Tao does not seek to overcome or conquer nature, but rather to become nature and thereby influence it imperceptibly (by flowing with it). Thus, inaction is not impotence, but goes beyond value judgments, to subvert the binary of good and bad, allowing for a mixture. Taoism's principle of inaction is “unencumbered by any concept of sin[;] . . . [it] doesn't see evil as a force to resist, but simply as an opaqueness, a state of self-absorption which is in disharmony with the universal process, so that, as with a dirty window, the light can't shine through” (Mitchell viii). Mitchell's quotation also serves as an example of the use of metaphor (or on a larger scale parable) that Taoist philosophy utilizes. Huang argues that Dick makes value judgments on the

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2 Variation in spelling due to brand of “Popularized Western Daoism” which has been differentiated from traditional Taoism (Jones and Klein).

evil of the Western concept of progress; this does not seem to be the case. Dick and Singh's works are without value judgments, even on the rhetoric of progress. Dick and Singh are moreover asking humanity to investigate itself and its societies, one aspect of this being progress, but there is no direct attack on progress. Philosophy or theology in itself at its worst can mean impotence, while at its best, philosophy "becomes a motivational and inspirational force that may actually have its own historical effect" (Boer 297). Dick and Singh's works aim to move beyond value judgments to a place of harmony with all that is, an existentialist-esque awareness of life as already perfect due to its pleasing variety. Self-realization allows many of the characters in these works to find their peace through the recognition that how they feel about their world and themselves is completely dependent on the way they perceive things. These works recognize that an internal change within the individual is necessary for an ever-evolving, maintainably decent society, while also allowing for personal contentment.

Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* and Vandana Singh's *Distances* meet the criteria of having a self-contained revolution rather than any external societal revolution. The characters experience an awareness of an enlightened state of consciousness that allows them to view their world as illusory and their view of their own freedom as independent from their perceived reality. This thesis will look at each work on its own for elements described in Taoism and Advaita Vedanta, including the symbols of light and dreams, which convey awareness of non-duality and hint at reality as an illusion. The characters in these stories are lost at first because their perception is limited to a fickle realm of existence, which is not to say they discover another (unchanging reality), but they are made aware that there is something lurking beyond what they

perceive to be reality. This thesis investigates the implied reality of the novels as an illusion and the possibility of recognition of a non-dual perceptive state. The works explored here are neither “essentially progressive or conservative” (*Scraps* 29) and do not value binary opposition, unless as a device, but deal more with finding a hybrid balance. *High Castle* and *Distances* investigate and expose the constructed nature of reality through its inherent dualism.

I will briefly explore previous criticism on the dualism of the mind as it relates to this thesis. Loy notes,

[T]he role of the mind in sense perception . . . how the mind does not just receive but interprets and synthesizes perceptions into the phenomenal world we experience. That perception involves conception is a commonplace of contemporary philosophy, although attention has shifted from Kant's Aristotelian categories to language as the means by which this organization occurs. But Indian philosophy has been aware of this since at least the time of Buddha. (42)

David Loy describes the mind's “usual distinction between subject and object, an experiencing self that is distinct from what is experienced, be it sense-object, physical action, or mental event” (25). Almost everything is further separated by value judgments that tend toward positive and negative identification as “perception is always dualistic” (Loy 62). As Terry Eagleton explains, “Ideologies like to draw rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not, between self and non-self, truth and falsity, sense and nonsense . . . central and marginal, surface and depth” (115). One thing is defined by its not being another thing so identification is conceived through rejection. As Scott Calef

explains, “things that have an opposite come to be from their opposite.” Rene Descartes explains that objects and people are further broken into various quantifiable terms with various attributes or durations (*Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*). As society divides humanity, it ascribes further definitions and value judgments to those various parts of the individual, thus treating humans like commodities. Each person’s value is then formed by how individual societies interpret various definitions, ultimately funneling humanity into piles clearly marked accepted and rejected, normal and abnormal. Suparno Banerjee expands on the words of Theodor W. Adorno:

Any authoritarian or fundamentalist ideology persistently marginalizes the ideological Other and at the same time rejects the possibility of human individuality—the ultimate culmination of Western rationality. The only full integration of the individual into the system is through death. (298)

Kant discusses the problems with constructed reason as it relies heavily on inherent divisions and arbitrary categorization where objects are,

[M]ediate[ly] represented by the concept of divisibility. All judgments are accordingly functions of unity among our representations, since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are thereby drawn into one. We can . . . trace all actions of understanding back to judgments, so that the understanding in general can be represented as a faculty for judging. (Kant 205)

Kant aptly describes how without even being aware of it necessarily, the human mind pre-figures and judges everything it thinks about or comes in contact with and divides behaviors/things/objects into arbitrary categories. Immediately judgments are made and reality is constructed. There is no escape from identification through false categorization of everything into binary camps. Dick voices the modern phobia of “the self unknown to the self” (*Shifting Realities* 113) where human beings have become objects for use:

[And] the production of such inauthentic human activity has become a science of government[,] . . . men made into machines. . . . The placing on what was a free man who laughed and cried and made mistakes . . . a restriction that limits him, despite what he may imagine or think, to the fulfilling of an aim outside of his own personal . . . destiny. . . . History has made him into its instrument[,] . . . ideologically oriented . . . [toward] some ultimately desired goal. (*Shifting Realities* 187)

When society seeks to repress what is seen as abnormal through ideologically implemented means that desire a standard of “normalcy,” any autonomous self is stifled. Tension arises as the individual feels forced into a “set of ideologies,” but as every person is a hybrid of many characteristics, “[this] creates a sense of non-belonging” (Banerjee 298). Dick and Singh offer one possible solution: not to be any certain way, but rather to access the freedom to explore the diversity of reality as “wisdom consist[s] in a certain mean between vice and virtue” (Trilling 18). The ability to access a truly autonomous self must be through self-awareness here, by delving “into the nature of our own beings” (*Shifting Realities* 189). Non-dual philosophies seek a hybrid individual with “a balanced dynamism, immobile only because the tensions within . . . are in absolute proportion”

(*Shifting Realities* 258).

Constructed society, built upon distinctions that are not inherent, mold human beings into prefabricated versions of what living humans should be, whereas “[t]ranscendental logic . . . has a manifold of sensibility that lies before it *a priori*” and by “putting different representations together with each other” one may comprehend “their manifoldness in one cognition” (Kant 210). Taoist and Advaitic philosophy use this transcendental logic to allow the reader to comprehend multiple levels of perception and the interrelatedness and separateness of each. Dick and Singh depict the individual as not purely one or another thing, but a multiplicity of characteristics and beliefs. The world is then represented by a variety of diverse and unique outlooks that when combined offer a broad perspective on reality. These authors aim to subvert a dualistic structure, political or otherwise, whether it is benevolent or malevolent. They attempt to replace value judgments with philosophical contemplation as to the character's situation in reality. Dick and Singh intend to subvert the ignorance of the mind which mistakenly sees oneself as unconnected to others:

[I]t is because of our dualistic ways of thinking that we perceive the world pluralistically[,] . . . the world as a collection of discrete things (including *me*) in space and time is not something objectively given, which we merely observe passively; if our ways of thinking change, that world changes also for us. (Loy 25)

According to Baudrillard, there is no distinction between reality and representations of reality. Nothing is real. This postmodern questioning of everything that is and the ultimate understanding that reality is synthesized is the exploration of sf, but

also of philosophies based in non-dualism. Both share the investigation of the construction of reality. Dick and Singh attempt to communicate the unmanifest by juxtaposing it with the suggestions inherent in the manifest. Sf can especially do this because it psychologically “cut[s] the reader loose from the actual world that he inhabits; [sf] deconstructs time, space, [and] reality” (*Shifting Realities* 45). Sf is therefore not dependent on the commonly believed reality existing in time and space as much as other mimetic genres.

Both *High Castle* and *Distances* explore reality as a construction and demonstrate the boundaries of cognition. These texts attempt to get outside the constructions of binary oppositions, which make up a columbarium. As Nietzsche's metaphor of the columbarium demonstrates, man endeavors “to build up a pyramidal order with castes and grades” (636) wherein everything has a value based on each person's personal myth background and society. The significance, value, and thingness given to objects is simply a recognition in the mind based upon signs and signifiers which individuals learn from their personal culture. Cognition is not the same as wisdom, rather “we may say that thinking is essentially the activity of operating with signs” (Calef). Dick in his essays, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, describes how he came to realize “that causality is a perception in the observer and not a datum of external reality” (45). The mind seeks to create order concerning events or aspects and thereby treats some aspects or things above others.

Sf is often used to subvert ideology or dominant binary structure, and combats established realities. These authors investigate the construction of reality further; *High Castle* and *Distances* discover the *value* of the edifice. *High Castle* and *Distances*

specific explorations of reality as constructed utilize non-dual philosophy in somewhat different ways to achieve this effect.

Philip K. Dick ponders the idea of the construction of life through the creative force of the novel. His characters discover their reality within a supposed work of fiction that leads them to question if freedom is not simply a realization of their boundaries. Through Dick's exploration of reality as a construction, the main characters recognize a constantly fleeting awareness and a discovery of immense conception. Neither perspective lends more than a realization of truth. The final hope for the novel rests in the enjoyment of reality through recognition of a somewhat disappointing authenticity, and the autonomy given to those who embrace the illusion. The meaninglessness and inconsequentiality of action is highlighted by the characters' use of the *I-Ching* and further is supported by Dick's personal reflections in *Shifting Realities*.

Vandana Singh writes an intricate novella utilizing her background in theoretical physics to support Advaitic philosophy, and she makes an argument for being present in reality using new myths based on non-dual Indian philosophy. Anasuya rides the waves of many universes, some just shy of imaginable, reaching toward the unknown to recognize that the phenomenal world is what cognitively exists and has a lot to offer. Singh's extensive knowledge of Advaita Vedanta allows her to intricately weave together multiple worlds framed within various levels of consciousness. The various worlds allow the protagonist Anasuya to view reality from different perspectives.

*High Castle* and *Distances* accomplish the very difficult task of breaking down binaries through their characters' rigorous process of self-discovery. These works are bold in their claim that human action alone cannot provide the change necessary for a



better world; rather, they explore a change in perspective. Although philosophy might seem a cerebral answer, the truth is that the accessibility of literature can allow people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultures to explore reality indirectly. Dick and Singh all use non-dual philosophy to allow for a broader conception of reality, one that recognizes and values an awareness and appreciation for diversity and hybridity that includes binaries, positive and negative, in existence.

## CHAPTER II

### SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS: MULTIPLE REALITIES IN

#### PHILIP K. DICK'S *THE SHIFTING REALITIES OF*

#### *PHILIP K. DICK AND THE MAN*

#### *IN THE HIGH CASTLE*

The concepts that Philip K. Dick explores through his use of Taoist philosophy are timelessness and infinity. The enhanced perception suggested by the Tao rests upon logic, rather than mysticism. *High Castle* refers to an understanding of possible choices instead of a correct or incorrect path; these works stress an ongoing discussion, or dialectic. Dick's characters question hegemony and ultimately discover that one dominant power is not preferable to another. Authoritarianism in general is arrogance. *High Castle* depicts the acceptance of reality in recognition of its ephemeral and flawed nature. The illusion and all-pervasive state that together comprise the non-dual is the basis for the philosophical exploration in Dick's essays: the expressed and unexpressed, the veil and the truth. Dick outright states that the main questions in his works are “[w]hat is reality?” and “What constitutes the authentic human being?” (*Shifting Realities* 260). Dick is described as “most of all [trying] to express in his novels the fight against oppression of the free human spirit, of whatever kind [for example,] . . . drug addiction or a police state” (*Shifting Realities* 23). Dick explores internal and external oppressions. He depicts the barriers within human beings as opposed to simply the outer forces of control. Social

modification through already implemented societal expectation enacts its dominion over the mind and stamps out individuality, making humanity almost android-like in Dick's opinion; he states that “in novel after novel that [he] write[s he] question[s] the reality of the world that the characters' percept-systems report” (*Shifting Realities* 46).

*High Castle* is no exception to Dick's exploration of the construction of reality by the mind in its limited perception that seeks categorization. This gets at the heart of why sf in particular is an appropriate genre to explore non-duality: “SF makes what would otherwise be an intellectual abstraction concrete” (*Shifting Realities* 44). Non-dualism as a philosophical concept can be explored as a societal norm, or a direct experience. Basically, philosophy can be explored as tangible rather than abstract. Dick explains that when he “became aware of the possible existence of a metaphysical realm beyond . . . the sensory world. [He] came to understand that the human mind could conceive of a realm of which the empirical world was epiphenomenal,” stating that he “came to believe that in a certain sense the empirical world was not truly real, at least not as real as the archetypal realm beyond it” (*Shifting Realities* 45-46).

Dick explains in his essays how the mind makes distinctions prior to recognizing any judgment, and thereby demonstrates the inherent divisiveness of reality. Positive or negative recognition is built into language,

[And] a good deal of organization is done within the percept system itself; that is, by less-than-conscious portions of the neurological apparatus, so by the time the self receives the sense data it has so to speak been automatically structured into the idiosyncratic worldview. (*Shifting Realities* 171-72)

Ultimately, this leads to societal behavior reinforcement that the community may even be unaware of to the exclusion of diversity; “thus . . . community is the causality of a substance in the reciprocal determination of others” (Kant 215). The individual then lacks uniqueness, representing instead an image mirrored after the values of others.

Dick describes an entirely new past in *High Castle* where the Axis won the war and Nazis largely control America. Alternative histories are an intriguing speculative study, but Dick takes this assumption further with the idea that the characters eventually discover that a fictional world inside a novel is an alternate reality. Interestingly, just as Dick used the *I-Ching* to plot *High Castle*, the author within *High Castle* uses the *I-Ching* to create his supposedly fictive world. *High Castle's* premise leads the characters (and furthermore the reader) to question the authenticity of their own reality. *High Castle* ultimately suggests that reality is constructed. In addition, the *I-Ching* plays an important role in stressing that perceived outcomes are as intentional as the throw of a dice. The alternative history is as imaginable for the characters in the novel as it is for actual humanity to have gone through such a history and the looming possibility of going through future possible wars, famines, and complete destructions. Alternative history serves as a warning, but also plays around with the Taoist theme of inaction and passivity. If any outcome is possible and there is no deliberate (or malaligned) cause and effect, then the best course of action is to follow reality's ebb and flow. Dick poses an ontological investigation of reality through the idea of reality as a construction in line with Taoist thought.

Dick explored spiritual philosophy since his first published work, “Beyond Lies the Wub” in which an empathetic little wub represents Dick's “idea of a higher life form”

(*Shifting Realities* 106). He defines empathy for the reader “as the ability to put yourself in someone else's place” (*Shifting Realities* 106). Non-dualism encompasses rather than rejects, as in the tradition of Western dualism. The division of the phenomenal world is inherent. The villain of Dick's first work “looks on other creatures in terms of sheer utility; they are objects to him, and he pays the ultimate price for this total failure of empathy” (*Shifting Realities* 107). *High Castle* espouses a philosophy which seeks to include and love one's fellows rather than exclude and use them. The totality sought in Dick's narratives assists in subverting binary judgments and allows for acceptance rather than rejection. Dick depicts the inclusiveness and acceptance of Taoist philosophy.

The *I-Ching* is the “Fifth Book of Confucian wisdom,” which “the Taoist oracle called for centuries the . . . Book of Changes” (*High Castle* 16). The *I-Ching* is a device to explore “synchronicity[,] . . . a meaningless coincidence” (*Shifting Realities* 126). Dick mentions the use of the *I-Ching* in *Shifting Realities* and its incorrect interpretation as a fortune-telling device. Frank Frink attempts to predict his future with the book in *High Castle*. Dick explains that the *I-Ching* is not a fortune teller and suggests that it is also without value judgments. It views outcomes as due to the stupid randomness of the universe. The *Tao* similarly explores the creative chaos inherent in the nature of being with inaction as a means to combat the seeming connection of cause and effect. Taoism depicts the world as an enigmatic response system of bewildering variability. Frink reads one hexagram as “Heaven in its time would raise him up to his old job or perhaps even to something better” (*High Castle* 13). By *High Castle's* end this does not occur as Frink reads value judgments into a book that does not view things in positive or negative terms. The hexagram was telling him to act modestly, which he understood to mean that if he

acted modestly good things would come. Rather it stresses the importance of modesty in his path, which could take multiple directions. If Frink acts modestly he will at least cultivate the correct behavior for whatever possible outcome.

The idea that the *I-Ching* offers a prescribed outcome and not simply a suggestion for behavior toward whatever eventual destiny awaits, or clarity on a given situation, is where those not familiar with it misinterpret it as a user's guide to happiness or getting what they want (the pervasive capitalist desire). Mr. Tagomi's recognition of the *I-Ching's* meaning is through his awareness of the Tao. He interprets his hexagram as “all unbalanced[,] . . . clearly away from the Tao” (*High Castle* 18). He acts in relation to flow so that he may adapt toward the balance of the Way, unlike those who hold “the Nordic ideology regarding so-called Oriental culture” (Dick 18). Dick reaffirms the proper interpretation of these Taoist symbols through a proper background in study. The *I-Ching* is without value judgments and only offers a clear picture of how things *are*, which can assist in deciding what they will be. How the *I-Ching* does this will be outlined further later on.

Dick's final chapter describes that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, the alternative history book in *High Castle* in which the Allies won the war, is actually another reality. To discuss further *High Castle's* conclusion, it “is operating under the assumption that [other] worlds exist, of which [*High Castle* is] one and Abdensen's world, written about as if imaginary fiction, is another” (*Shifting Realities* 130). The reader is not only taking part in the discovery of an alternative reality in which the Germans did win the war, but this further suggests that the reader's world may be a story being read by someone else. The ultimate suggestion is that reality is an edifice. *The Grasshopper* allows the

characters in the novel to speculate about other possible realities and question the authenticity of their own. Abdensen and Juliana though discover what is beyond the recognition of truth: the acceptance of flaw. There is no *better* reality, only a different one. Truth is awareness, nothing more. Truth is not positive or negative here, and can be disorienting, whereas habit is soothing.

A true reality seems to suggest a more *real* or fundamental way to live. In *High Castle*, Abdensen and Juliana realize truth is not necessarily preferable to illusion. Comfort can stand above freedom. At *High Castle's* close Abdensen, his wife, and Juliana (the bringer of the truth) all react somewhat differently, once they become aware of the truth that reality may be fictive. Abdensen decides to have a drink and act as though nothing has changed, but states: “I think we're all of us lucky”; Abdensen's wife feels Juliana has been “terribly disruptive” in exposing this truth, and Abdensen aptly replies “so is reality” (*High Castle* 258). Juliana feels that “[t]he problem did not bother her. I must be a little like [Abdensen], she thought; I won't let certain things worry me no matter how important they are. . . . [H]ow strange[,] . . . I never thought the truth would make you angry. . . . Truth, she thought. As terrible as death. But harder to find. I'm lucky” (*High Castle* 259). Death here, as discussed later, is an immutable state lacking any characteristics. Juliana instead discovers unbound existence, which is preferable to nothingness.

Abdensen will continue to enjoy his life as the truth has reconfirmed for him that no better world awaits him. Juliana feels freed by her discovery and can now attempt anything she may wish to do as her limits have expanded. Abdensen's wife is living in

fear of her husband's death, so the truth has only made him a further target in her mind, and she continues to suffer. *High Castle* speculates that “death as a factor of reality, perhaps should not be known about at all” (174). The metaphorical death that is suggested here is that which is beyond knowledge, beyond reality as it is known. The *Tao* expresses complete knowledge as integration into oneness. The *Tao* describes this unknowable state as “a vast immeasurable void[,] . . . existence in non-existence[,] . . . meet it and it has no face” (*Tao Te Ching* 7-8). Abdensen and Juliana view life as a series of fluctuations, the alternative being perpetual nothingness. Recognizing that reality is a construction does not necessarily remove tension; it can leave life void of a higher or ideal reality. But if removing reality's tyrannical hold on the mind has the power to do anything, it has the power to free the mind from the belief that it can ever find perfection in a dynamic world. The goal then becomes to live as well as humanly possible in present reality. The *I-Ching* is a deliberate choice for Dick to include within his work as it recognizes and appreciates the changing nature of experienced reality.

As the *I-Ching* “works on the basis of synchronicity” (*High Castle* 176), there is a strong connection to the symbol of death and the infinite as well. Dick defines synchronicity as “coincidence,” referring to:

Acausal connectives[,] . . . events occurring outside of time. . . . [T]his unfolding is not in any sense a causal progression; it is the vertical opening forth . . . rather than the horizontal cause-and-effect sequence that we experience by clock time, and since it is timeless, it is unlimited in extent; it has no built-in end. (*Shifting Realities* 177)



Whereas in typical perception:

We rub up against only as much reality as we can handle. . . . [W]e haven't failed to get that annual medical checkup yet[,] . . . our partial knowledge [or lack there of] is sufficient to get us by. . . . [W]hat will destroy us in the end is synchronicity; eventually we will arrive at a blind intersection at 4 a.m. the same time another idiot does, also tanked up with beer; both of us will then depart for the next life. (*Shifting Realities* 178-9)

Dick next poses the question, what if it were possible to “plot in advance . . . the approach of all meaningful coincidences. . . . Is that *a priori*, by the very meaning of the word . . . ?” (*Shifting Realities* 179). He goes on to say that since coincidences do not require the past, that it would seem impossible to predict such chance encounters. He then uses schizophrenics and people on LSD as an example, noting that anyone perceiving cognition on multiple levels of consciousness is experiencing this synchronicity: it “has been going on all the time; it's only news to *us* that such coincidences can happen” (*Shifting Realities* 179). The theory is that certain people tap in to different states of consciousness, and that these various cognitive states are no less real than anything else perceived in the world. Here is where the *I-Ching* becomes relevant as it has been used “for three thousand years” by a wide range of people:

Physicists [used it] to plot the behavior of subatomic particles. . . . John Cage, the composer, use[d] it to derive chord progressions. . . . Leibnitz based his binary system on it . . . [and] it works (roughly 80 percent of the time, according to those such as Pauli who have analyzed it on a statistical basis). (*Shifting Realities* 179)

Dick stresses that the *I-Ching*:

Is not a fortunetelling device. . . . True, the book *seems* to deal with the future; it lays before your eyes, for your scrutiny, a gestalt of the forces in operation that will *determine* the future. But these forces are at work now; they exist, so to speak, outside of time. . . . the book is analytical and diagnostic, not predictive. . . . [I]t tells you what is going on *now* . . . and out of a knowledge of that . . . it may possibly be able, to some extent, to predict what may happen in the future. (*Shifting Realities* 179)

Dick gives the metaphor of a good physical that assists a doctor in the prevention of death from various diseases. The *I-Ching*, then, is helpful in a logical way, but it is not magic. It offers “a total configuration of the *koinos kosmos* [shared world]. . . . Knowledge of this sort is obviously of vast value to anyone, since, by means of it, a fairly good guess can be made about the future” (*Shifting Realities* 180). The *I-Ching* operates on the concept of awareness.

Robert Childan and Mr. Tagomi reach a certain level of awareness in *High Castle*, but not through *Grasshopper's* message, rather through the assistance of meditation or contemplation. In *High Castle*, Childan is the first to become aware of a higher order of being. He enjoys his rickshaw ride, albeit for what he believes to be reasons concerning class status. Childan describes the ride as “a sort of relaxing machine. . . . To be pulled instead of having to pull. And—to have, if even for a moment, higher place” but “guiltily, he woke himself” (*High Castle* 23). After the discussion on the connection of waking to awareness as from a dream, the wording here is not arbitrary. He is lulled into a peaceful state by “the uproar of radios, traffic noises, the signs and people. . . . They blotted out his

inner worries” (*High Castle* 23). This co-mingling of noises disconnects Childan from his world and aids in his contemplation beyond the reality around him. He indeed reaches a higher consciousness, but not in a hierarchical way. Childan is released, if only for a moment, from the veil of reality.

Later, Mr. Tagomi is in crisis. He stops to return his murderous weapon and free himself of this symbol of earthly transgression, but instead picks up an odd piece of jewelry. He is told the object has *wu* or “some ethereal value” (*High Castle* 176). As Mr. Tagomi meditates on the object, he thinks “[y]es, this thing has disgorged its spirit: light. And my attention is fixed; I can't look away. Spellbound by mesmerizing shimmering surface which I can no longer control. No longer free to dismiss” (*High Castle* 230). Mr. Tagomi enters the world of pure being, a world “[u]nmoving; infinite; standing alone; never changing. It is everywhere and it is inexhaustible” (*The Book of Tao* 6). He no longer needs to try; everything just *is* and continues to be. He simply exists for a time. Mr. Tagomi accesses a world without definitions.

Since language is constructed, the *Tao* depicts it as a barrier to a state of pure being. Bert Olivier explains how “one can be 'relatively' autonomous, insofar as everyone, no matter how independently-minded, is to some degree dependent on other people, on conventions and on things that he or she has not created, such as language” (292). Mr. Tagomi briefly “free[s his] perception from its reliance on the finite, limited frames of reference (especially the social frames)” (Rehorick 340). By labeling the world and all the things in it, humanity ascribes to a typical set of standards, and human beings are subsequently boxed-in. David Loy writes in his chapter on *wei wu wei* that “nondual action has just been defined as action in which there is no awareness by the agent, the

subject that is usually believed to *do* the action, of being distinct from an objective action that is *done*” (97). Tagomi glimpses the possibility of integration into being through the removal of language. This is the Way of the Tao as it is described as “nameless. . . . [W]hoever knows does not speak; whoever speaks does not know” (*Tao Te Ching* 10-11); it is “when civilization grew, names began. With names, one should know where to stop” (*Tao Te Ching* 8-9). The *Tao* depicts the gluttony of division, the mind's inability to stop classifying and ordering as “perception is always dualistic” (Loy 62). Tagomi attempts to get beyond the limitations of prescribed doctrine in which there is pure existence without thought. Thought is naturally composed of language, where thought is not is “the real Tao. . . . [Where] words cannot describe it” (*The Book of Tao* 5).

Mr. Tagomi is quite literally brought into the light of awareness as he meditates on the silver triangle:

But I do not have to wait for death, for the decomposition of my animus as it wanders in search of a new womb. All the terrifying and beneficent deities; we will bypass them, and the smoky lights as well. . . . Everything except this light. I am ready to face without terror. . . . I feel the hot winds of karma driving me. Nevertheless I remain here. My training was correct: I must not shirk from the clear white light, for if I do, I will once more re-enter the cycle of birth and death, never knowing freedom, never obtaining release. The veil of maya will fall once more if I—The light disappeared.

(*High Castle* 230)

This knowledge of truth is a precarious thing. Like the light, truth disappears too easily. Light representing the self or soul's awareness is not unique to Taoism, as Descartes even

indicated that light represented the soul within the body (*Descartes' Philosophical Writings*). Tagomi finds it difficult to maintain the awareness, and once the light fades, he finds himself under the veil of illusion again. He forgets that truth cannot be undone and always awaits the individual: “Mr. Tagomi thought, spoiled. My chance at nirvana. Gone” (*High Castle* 230). But true being cannot be erased; it can only be forgotten, and Mr. Tagomi, moments after his realization, finds himself already forgetting.

After Tagomi is awakened from his meditation, he wanders into an all-whites diner. Tagomi mentions he is in “*Bardo Thodol* existence” and tells himself that “the *Book of the Dead* prepares us: after death we seem to glimpse others, but all appear hostile to us. One stands isolated” (*High Castle* 232). Tagomi recognizes his return to “realms of suffering, rebirth [which are] ready to receive the fleeing, demoralized spirit. [A return to realms of] delusions” (*High Castle* 232). Tagomi refers to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or “The Great Deliverance by Hearing While on the After-Death Plane, from The Profound Doctrine of the Emancipating of the Consciousness by Meditation upon the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities” (Karma-glin-pa 83). The book offers advice to the newly “dead,” or those in an intermediate state between life and death. The meditation focuses on forces both benevolent and malevolent; it requires a recognition of balance over value judgments. The Bardo Thodol state Tagomi experiences is similar to the depiction of non-dual perception in the *Tao*. Tagomi enters into this liberated perception after obeisance to Boundless Light, also described as the path to liberation in *The Book of the Dead*; after this liberation, *The Book* refers to a state akin to a dream (Karma-glin-pa 85-90). Tagomi refers to his new perception as a world of light and shadows; he questions “Where am I? Out of my world, my space and time” (*High Castle* 232). He

ultimately recognizes the value in living within his prior reality, stating that the silver object disoriented him and left him feeling as if he stood “on nothing” (*High Castle* 232). This is similar to how Dick depicted the full perception of the *now* in *Shifting Realities* as a schizophrenic-like state. Tagomi's awareness of a static state allows him to appreciate the constraints of time and the seeming cohesiveness of his reality. Without perceived time, “one seeks to contravene one's perceptions—why? So that one can wander utterly lost, without signposts or guide? . . . [The] world seen merely in symbolic . . . aspect, totally confused with unconscious material”; Tagomi decides to “restore ego center,” and the “diffusion subsided” (*High Castle* 232-33). Tagomi prefers to live in the world, even with the hellish circumstances that surround him.

Mr. Tagomi begins to lose his grasp on reality as in a dream, where shapes and figures no longer make sense to him; the logical order of the world is deranged. Dreams symbolize reality as distorted in *High Castle*. Tagomi glimpses beyond false reality, however briefly, because his mind imagines existence outside the logic and compartmentalization of language, “[m]ad dream, Mr. Tagomi thought. Must wake up” (*High Castle* 231). Mr. Tagomi doubts the authenticity of inherent truth *and* constructed reality, emphasizing again the need for both and the hierarchy of none. He also recognizes the limits of his cognitive capabilities when he states: “[i]nner Truth. . . . It is I . . . I will never fully understand; that is the nature of such creatures. Or is this Inner Truth now, this that is happening to me? I will wait. I will see. Which it is. Perhaps it is both” (*High Castle* 240). Tagomi questions the infinite and finite that comprise the wholeness of non-duality. As things exist together at the same time (in polyphony) so “I” is recognized as the superficial atop the deep “one,” the wave atop the ocean.

Dick's characters do not suffer from what their current situation imposes upon them, but rather the tension arises from what they fail to see: “there is such a thing as negative hallucination—that is, instead of seeing what is not there, the patient cannot see what is” (*Shifting Realities* 169). This almost explains the concept of the non-cognitive capability of a non-dual oneness, “since our very oneness with it means we are unable to understand it objectively” (Loy 62). The limited hallucinatory status of normal cognitive reality retards the mind into forgetting. Dick defines a hallucination as “not, strictly speaking, manufactured by the brain; it is received by the brain, like any 'real' sense datum, and . . . acts in response to this . . . perception of reality in as logical a way as we do to our sense data” (*Shifting Realities* 167). Dick emphasizes here that the mind is capable of seeing different spheres of reality. The limits of the conventional mind are habituated to the common sensory data of its society. *High Castle* suggests that there is no preference for one political construct or one societal system above another. Life is how it is perceived.

### CHAPTER III

#### EVERYTHING AND ITS OPPOSITE: CREATION AND ABSENCE IN THE MATHEMATICAL POETRY OF VANDANA SINGH'S *DISTANCES*

What *High Castle* and *Distances* have in common defy their disparate philosophies by exploring similar themes. They investigate reality as an illusion—referred to here in the Advaitic philosophy as maya. Both philosophies also explore a perfect, unchanging state (Brahman), which combined with maya is non-duality. Dreams again hint at reality as a construction and light suggests awareness of an immutable state. The protagonist of Vandana Singh's *Distances*, Anasuya, has an *atmis* (derived from the Sanskrit word “atman” meaning soul or self) which allows her to access a broader awareness of her reality. Singh uses multiple worlds to intertwine pluralities of realities. There is Anasuya's world of origin, the sea (Sagara), which is a world more in tune with the organic where Anasuya experiences a way of life in which most beings have a developed *atmis* in some way.

*Distances* suggests that those from Sagara perceive connections to their world more fully, approaching closer to an awareness of reality as immanent. There is an abstract world of mathematical spaces in an apparatus called an *amnion*. Reality within the *amnion* functions as a non-dual (Advaitic) state where Anasuya explores the mathematical and creative space, hoping to probe the infinite. One world outside the *amnion* called The Desert City denotes the imperfection of maya (illusion of reality), yet



a small sect of people in the desert seem to be esoteric wanderers (in direct search of a one, true self). There are also hints at a supreme self (Brahman) reflected in the character of Vara. Anasuya, through her *athmis*, has a broader perception of her reality since she is able to see harmonies more clearly than those whose *athmis* is poorly functioning or dormant. *Distances'* basis in mathematical and philosophical worlds allows Anasuya to explore the ontological and scientific, which are in many ways similar. This could be compared to exploring two seemingly different percept-systems and their commonalities, binaries within the whole. Anasuya's *athmis* allows her to view “area[s] of reality that the rest of [humanity] cannot . . . reach” (*Shifting Realities* 171). Again, by invoking the philosophical, all-encompassing non-dual, “Singh . . . argue[s] for speculative literature that would allow . . . authors to imagine futures different from the hegemonic Western pattern. . . . More often than not these works genuinely question all ideologies of domination” (Banerjee 284).

*Distances* is a novella published by Aqueduct Press, located in Seattle, and written by Vandana Singh, an India-born author educated in the United States, currently residing near Boston, who now writes “almost exclusively in English” (*vandana singh: writer*). Singh uses her unique hybrid perspective (both Western and a self-described alien) to explore Anasuya's creative and mathematical worlds. The protagonist discovers herself while simultaneously losing her identity. By recognizing she is not the external representation of herself, she discovers connections that she had never seen before, even as a mathematician. While Singh could logically be placed within the Western sf tradition, her work is also “full of Indian cultural references (including diction) . . . [and her] language and narrative style subtly buttress her conceptual framework” (Banerjee

287). In *Distances*, Anasuya is a mathematical artist who originally comes from the sea. Her special gift, an *athmis*, allows her to see “mathematical harmonies” (Singh 4) and ride waves, mapping space by intuition where “she traverses the coalesced space-time in her mind” (Banerjee 301).

Many elements from the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta are blatantly suggested in *Distances*. As prefaced in the introduction of this thesis, Singh utilizes the concept of *maya*, which in Sanskrit means “illusion” and also references a reality where there is “the delusion of duality” (Loy 150). Singh also includes non-duality, which is integral to this argument, and which recognizes a unity in multiformity, whereas the mind generally perceives through “dualistic categories of understanding” (Loy 93). Singh also explores the suggestion of an ultimate self (Brahman), pervading all of life, which is experiential only since true “awareness . . . is not intuition *of* Brahman, but itself *is* Brahman” (Loy 62). The nature of Anasuya's reality is based on multiple worlds that offer her different perceptions or suggestions of reality. She explores the world of *maya* in the desert city and finds the beauty in ephemeral reality; she views the harmonies of the world through her particular *athmis* which has gifted her with the perception of mathematical unity; and she recognizes herself as a reflection of Brahman in the vision of *Vara*.

Binaries are present throughout *Distances* as well, such as reality/illusion and inside/outside. Singh then uses hybridity to bring disparate things together, as opposed to dividing them. Even her word choice points to opposites or seeming oxymorons like creative “mathematics” (4), “light and darkness” (Singh 4), “bilateral symmetry” (5), “river mouths bifurcating” (4), and characters made up of “contradictory geometries, all jagged, moody edginess, and abrupt changes of behavior[,] . . . intensity alternated with

apathy and aloofness” (7). The illusion of reality as thought construction based in perception in Advaita Vedanta is described by Loy in the “Sanskrit terms . . . *vikalpa*, a compound from the prefix *vi* (discrimination or bifurcation) and the root *kalpana* (to construct mentally)” (Loy 43). Singh uses intensely dynamic characters to highlight the diversity of Anasuya's world outside the amnion, while using mapping to demonstrate some order within it and emphasize the realization of connections in non-dual perception. Singh then uses glimpses at Vara to represent Brahman, which is “beyond all perception” (Loy 68).

The first world mentioned is the reality Anasuya enters after mapping space in the amnion, which is her job. Anasuya's normal world is described as a “physical reality,” and after her enhanced perception in the amnion, it “left [Anasuya] feeling disoriented and vaguely claustrophobic” (Singh 1). Anasuya's main reality is a world of sensations both pleasant *and* undesirable as she later explores cravings such as loneliness and hunger. The novella describes Anasuya as “remember[ing] the world again” (Singh 1) as she comes back into the consciousness of the world of duality. As Anasuya forgets her connectedness, she remembers the divisive world. She is a particularly sought-after wave rider and she is asked by beings from the stars to assist them in solving their highly complex mathematical equations. *Sthana* in Sanskrit means “space” (Cardona, Deshpande, and Hook 29) and this space contains both patterns described as present in nature and blank spaces. This could refer to the patterns accessible through non-dual perception and the completely experiential space often described with a complete lack of attributes, as it is unfathomable. Anasuya helps the aliens map their equations of hyper spatial movement suggesting a complete understanding of the reality of the universe. The

new sthanas of Nirx that Anasuya explores in the amnion is a “poem” (Singh 14) of balanced knowledge. While Anasuya blindly maps space with her intuitive mathematics, she questions “whether the sthanas of Nirx was the representation of some physical system; but correspondences to reality, or what others narrowly defined to be reality, were less important to her than the mathematics—and the uses of things were not even of peripheral concern” (Singh 12). It appears the space corresponds to a reality Anasuya is capable of recognizing, but because this discovery is not what she is looking for, she does not focus on the possibility of its relation to a concrete reality. The sthanas will be explored in more detail later on in this chapter. Because Anasuya has lived with her athmis that allows her to see underlying connections since year five, she is less concerned with known existence, and is searching for the suggestion of a reality outside what she currently understands. Anasuya ultimately accepts and appreciates her current reality through her recognition of another, virtually unlivable, one:

Scott Bukatman calls this type of conceptual spatial existence ‘paraspace’—‘a science fictional space that exists parallel to the normal space of the diegesis—a rhetorically heightened’ other [world, and] Singh uses [this] to overcome the feeling of alienation—to reduce the distance between the split halves within one's self and to forge a new identity that submits to the permanent state of estrangement without a constant anxiety. (Banerjee 301)

Singh uses paraspace to suggest an assumed realm that frees Anasuya from the tension of her existence and allows her to forge an autonomous identity not dependent on her job, her skin (which is green), or even her athmis. Anasuya misses the actual goal of

her discovery of the sthanas—that the sthanas reflects her present reality which *is* the sought-after state. Instead, she searches for some imaginably preferential reality. Through Anasuya's search and her eventual mapping of the sthanas of Nirx in the amnion, Anasuya relinquishes her creation. Instead of feeling most present in the amnion, Anasuya learns the pleasures and joys of the reality around her. Anasuya's exploration of multiple worlds allows her to discover a hybrid and adaptable identity through experiencing reality as it is, not how it should be. By viewing herself as a reflection of her world, Anasuya finds a way to appreciate ephemeral reality for its camaraderie and diversity through the suggestion of a static unity in the always-present face of Vara.

Inside the amnion, Anasuya maps space by riding waves. Singh received her Ph.D. in theoretical particle physics, which impels the connection between Anasuya's wave riding and wave-particle duality (also known as wave-particle complementarity). This principle:

State[s] the mutual exclusiveness and joint full completeness of the two (classical) descriptions of quantum systems. . . . [T]he wave-particle duality, or wave-particle complementarity, could be expressed by stating that it is impossible to build up an experimental arrangement in which we observe at the same time both [particle] and wave aspects. (Boscá Díaz-Pintado)

Wave-particle complementarity essentially explains non-duality where two things can be viewed as mutually exclusive (the basic cognition of things dualistically by the mind and a pervasive reality which encompasses the dualistic one as well) and fully fused (reality as theologically immanent and only experiential), and the inability for the dualistic mind

to view both simultaneously. As harmonies are vivid to Anasuya within the amnion, she maps space, but also wishes to create. While Anasuya's job is mapping space, she desires to create art within the amnion as well. Vara comes to her at times in the amnion, and through her wordless communication, Vara imprints upon Anasuya's mind that she must *create*. Creation is another element that weighs heavy with significance in the non-dual philosophical tradition, which will be explored later in this chapter as well. Most of all, Anasuya does what comes naturally and joyfully to her, and the reader is told that the whole point of these creations is as an offering to the god, Anhutip. Progress is not the goal of the people in any of the worlds Anasuya is familiar with at first.

Anasuya's world does not consider progress, in the Western sense, a proper goal of life and the Temple chemist explains to Nirx and the aliens from the stars, “efficiency as a moral principle is not the norm here” (Singh 62). Anasuya is surprised to hear from Nirx that her own people, those who come from the stars, live in a world, much like the western reader's reality, in which efficiency is the ultimate aim in work and all actions must be justified. Nirx tells Anasuya, “on my world, everything that we wish to do that is outside the norm must be justified. Life is not easy on my world” (Singh 62). Nirx's world is ordered through something called a Lattice, which “connect[s] every human on Tirana to every other human; it was physical but had grown organically, a mesh of connections and hierarchies, social relations, governing bodies and knowledge structures with both history and geography” (Singh 79). Nirx's world is a highly ordered and utilitarian world. The Lattice's order, like that of the reader's Western society, is set in motion and develops further ideological divisions through those already created. This ultimately implements a set of invisible normalizing forces that serve to reaffirm one

dominant power structure. Furthermore, “Nirx's team maintained that the Lattice was the inspiration behind Nirx's discovery of the new sthanas, although the Lattice was only the launching point, the idea seed that had given rise to Nirx's equations” (Singh 79). The Lattice being described as leading to the new sthanas is interesting when connected with the idea that portions of the sthanas are “a natural system” (Singh 79), perhaps even the dualistic reality known to Anasuya outside the amnion (but less apparent to her with her gift of perceiving harmonies). So if a dualistic reality is the seed reflected within the new sthanas, and dualistic reality is constantly pervaded by perpetually existing, blank spaces, this can be compared with non-duality. The suggestion being that the new equations may contain the hint of a reality pervading the mutable one.

Anasuya describes how in mapping Nirx's mathematics, “she was waiting for the confluence of the . . . mysteries, for enlightenment to come to her at last, but right now she could only imagine it or dream it. . . . Vara's face appeared and disappeared in her dream” (Singh 66). Anasuya's discovery of the sthanas is the recognition that Brahman (space lacking attributes) is projecting the dualistic world. The new sthanas only prove that what pervades mutable reality is the immutable, which dreams up the illusion of a diverse reality. Upon discovering the secret of the sthanas, Anasuya announces “this sthanas of Nirx's equations . . . is the geometry of meta-reality. The four-d manifold is our space and time” (Singh 85). Since Brahman pervades all, the suggestion is that Anasuya merely discovers the pervasive unity that manifests dualistic reality. Anasuya did not create or experience ultimate reality; she merely removes her limitations to recognizing it is all around her: “I do not attain to merge with this Brahman; I merely realize that I have always been Brahman” (Loy 198). Anasuya hopes that by solving the

mystery of the new sthanas she can defy wave-particle duality by experiencing everything at once, and find a “short-cut through the topography of the sthanas” (Singh 85) toward experiencing ultimate reality.

The novella does not end here. Anasuya goes to the Desert City to recognize that to attain the completely experiential state would mean a loss of her multitude of sensations in exchange for nothingness. Since complete being is described as lacking characteristics, like a void, this suggests that to discover ultimate reality or truth is pointless because it is a state of absence. Its only function is to manifest the diversity and joy capable of being experienced in projected reality. *Distances* then suggests what Dick describes as humanity being “kept ignorant of what [they] must be ignorant of” (*Shifting Realities* 221) to enjoy the realism of the illusion. Nirx is even accused of trying to conceal the truth, which is actually a kindness as the dangers of the truth are depicted later in the Temple Master's suicide. Nirx asks Anasuya, “why is it we must seek answers? Why can't we be content with our ignorance?” (Singh 129). To show that Anasuya is discovering her own mystery through the equations of Nirx, Nirx explains that they do not see duality as negative. Instead Nirx's people view it as the truer reality of experience, non-homogeneity: “we call it . . . [the] higher-dimensional space” (Singh 85). Nirx demonstrates to Anasuya the value of diverse and flawed reality through Anasuya's realization of the suggestion of her ultimate self. Anasuya is not meant to live in ideal reality. She is meant to discover her connection to it, because “self-consciousness is not the attribute of the Soul, but it is immanent to every cognition without exception” (Loy 57). Anasuya bridges the gaps between concrete space and 'paraspace' only to discover that everything that *is* is exactly how it should be; there is nothing greater, just



(the truth/realization of) what already is as “the spiritual path involves eliminating only the delusion of duality. . . . [T]he goal is simply to *realize* and *live* this nondual nature” (Loy 27).

The narrator discusses next a phenomenal reality, the city where “the citizens went about their business” still “unaware of the beauty of their environs . . . and their skin was brown, not green like Anasuya's” (Singh 15). While the divisive and in-tune live in the same world, it is the *atmism* which changes reality for each, so dual and non-dual perspectives co-exist side by side. It is true self which is experiential only and to exist in it purely would mean effectively becoming consciousness itself instead of being conscious: “Brahman is the ultimate reality which is the ground of all universe. . . . I am and always have been Brahman” (Loy 198). The hint is made though. The narrator admits that Anasuya finds “the City had made her welcome; she even had . . . companionship and intimacy” (Singh 15). Although Anasuya says that she feels more in touch with the world in the amnion, she appreciates the world of sensations with her “pentad” (Singh 15) of lovers. The City is the flawed world of illusion (*maya*). The narrator states that,

The city itself was an artifice. . . . [T]wice a year . . . the City played host to two great migratory gatherings, that had (in some forgotten past) birthed the original habitation that was to become the City . . . [and] as was appropriate for visiting deities, the guest gods were taken in processions to meet the old gods of the desert, Anhutip and the Two Lovers, Ekatiip and Shunyatiip. (Singh 16)

The illusory world here is depicted as created by a collective.

Anhutip is referred to as the mischief maker (Singh 17) and placed alongside the

Two Lovers in whose temple “few things were taboo” (Singh 17), clearly identifying the Two Lovers (Ekatip and Shunyatip) as representing the encompassing non-dual in Advaitic philosophy, which includes maya or illusion (which is represented by the symbol of the trickster). The illusory world or “māyā in its more original meaning [is] 'magic trick' . . . whose objectivity is as delusive as the illusions of a magician. Sankara makes maya more 'concrete' when he also describes it as a positive, beginningless material causal force responsible for creating the world” (Loy 67). As the non-dual unifies multiplicity, “even the followers of Anhutip were welcome at the Temple of Two Lovers, despite the fact that Anhutip was the one who had played a trick on the two gods” (Singh 17). This creative polytheism is another way to advocate a world accepting of hybridity and diversity, a world unified by harmonies instead of a world divided through seeming differences. While the migratory gods birthed the City, it was Anhutip “who had breathed the world into being” (Singh 17). Again, this represents the cyclical relationship of the pervading Brahman whose sole manifestation is known reality. During the festivals that commemorate these gods and their stories of creation, “the scant desert rain fell[,] . . . filling the air with the moist aroma of memory” (Singh 17).

Water represents truth in Singh's novella and this creation story hinges on the constructed world of duality, offering Anasuya the hint at its opposite: a static, or pure self and “if . . . the objective world . . . is due to our ways of thinking about it, it suggests that the significance of our thought-process is much greater than we usually believe. . . . [T]hus māyā refers to the fact that the delusive objectification of the world has a [complete] dimension which transcends the delusion of particular individuals” (Loy 67). In *Distances*, “it rained [in the City] only about twice a year, and each time the brief rain

was like a mockery of the endless bounty of the sea” (Singh 18). One thing (or reality) suggests its opposite. In non-duality there is an intermingling of, not two disparate realities acting apart from one another, but rather a gestalt, “seeing many but knowing *a priori* that . . . only the One existed” (*Shifting Realities* 222); this is not the unified “vast Mind, immanent within” as with Brahman, rather it is only the suggestion of Brahman. It is in the City, in flawed existence, that Anasuya approaches self (Brahman): “these were the only times that Anasuya felt as though something in her was coming alive, unfolding petal by petal” (Singh 17). All the variety, the excessive living, suggests for Anasuya the static pervasiveness that is glimpsed (as Vara) in the amnion:

Ordinary people munching the oily, spiced crackers that vendors sold in the evenings, people laughing, arguing, gossiping with each other, sipping nectar from little pipe-straws. . . . [S]he saw in their brown skin, in the shape of one's forehead, in the set of another's jaw, pieces of Vara. (Singh 41)

Anasuya investigates her connection to the abstract in her exploration of the mathematical world she accesses through the amnion: “Anasuya felt the familiar . . . exhilaration—and a curious switching of realities, as though the external world of people and lovers, the weight of her own incompleteness, her hopeless, endless nostalgia, had lost all definition, and the abstractions of mathematics were once again the things of true substance, tangible, real” (Singh 8). This not only describes an incompleteness in the empirical world indicative of lacking the wholeness of non-duality, but also suggests a removal of borders, and a loss of external societal identity. The amnion mixes with Anasuya's body's sap:

[C]alled *vapasjal*, that which is given back or returned . . . [and] as [it] interacted with the chemical stew of the amnion, a space blossomed in her mind, the most abstract-made world there could be [then] the tiny, invisible machines . . . transmitted a holographic representation of this inner space . . . and, through a complex science of interpretation and analysis, including trial and error and constant tinkering, they had to attempt to fill in the solution space of the given mathematics. . .

[Anasuya's] mathematics was experiential, a sixth sense which bared before her the harmonies, natural and artificial, that formed the sub-text of the world. (Singh 8-9)

The abstract space blossoming in Anasuya's mind allows her to glimpse further the non-dual concept; she is *returning* to the realization of the connectedness of the world in her recognition of “harmonies.” Still, though, Anasuya's non-dual space of order and exhilaration in creative exploration has not yet brought her to the realization of Brahman. She is too aware of her existence and is experiencing passions along with intuition. Anasuya is in the best possible state; she recognizes the harmonies of life without abandoning the illusion of existence. Anasuya experiences the world as a creative force.

Anasuya's body sap (*vapasjal* or *vapas*=return and *jal*=water in Hindi) returns Anasuya to the non-dual perception that she experiences in the waters of Sagara, now in the amnion. The *vapasjal*, though, transmits an inner space for Anasuya, one that is termed “experiential.” Anasuya's particular gift allows her to hone in on the “sub-text” of her world. Anasuya explores the non-dual space of the amnion where she discovers clues that hint at the “sub-text” of the world in Vara's face. Anasuya's assignment is to discover

what connects the world as “she looked for similarities, skated over manifolds, sketched out the abstract. . . . [S]he took the esoteric world . . . and made it her reality” (Singh 9), but she cannot help but form her own questions as to Vara's significance. The protagonist cannot help but ask the larger question of why she was created. Singh establishes the realms that Dick only suggests; Singh sets up her protagonist with the potential to actually exist in a non-dual space. The absence described as the ever-present antithesis to ephemeral reality's passionate fluctuations is explored in the representation of the Nameless Goddess.

The Nameless Goddess allows Singh to represent an infinite, static state. It is said that the Nameless Goddess' “followers are few; they live on the edge of the City or around small oases in the wilderness, and they believe that the desert is both the body and spirit of the Goddess. Anasuya could hardly believe that people would want to live out in the desert” (Singh 43). The Nameless Goddess' followers are described as ascetics here, and Anasuya is surprised they desire to live simply—without common worldly pleasures. The desert suggests a path of abstinence from desire devoted toward the Nameless Goddess. The search for ultimate reality, which only needs to be recognized, is not depicted as something Anasuya finds appealing. This alludes to her final discovery that the greater reality she searches for all along is merely an appreciation for her own world. The Nameless Goddess, “an old rival of Anhutip” (Singh 73)—the god symbolizing the illusion of reality—represents the ineffable, experiential state as “her people claim that not only is she the only real thing in the universe, she is greater than reality. She is what holds reality” (Singh 73). Just as Brahman and maya comprise the non-dual, Brahman is also the complete experience of being, outside of duality and the awareness of it

combined with Brahman; and “[*m*]āyā is that which appears to be real at the time of experience but which does not have ultimate existence. It is dependent on pure consciousness,” whereas Brahman is not dependent on anything (Menon). Since Anhutip “breathed the world into being,” he corresponds to maya which “is responsible for the creation of the world” or the illusion (Menon). The Nameless Goddess is sought after by the desert esoterics through their abstinence, but also by the mathematicians, like Anasuya, who map “pathways through meta-reality” to find out how and for what purpose “reality lay coiled in the body of the Goddess” (Singh 74). Anasuya's discovery of the sthanas is also significant because it does not lead her to an ultimate unlocking of a perfect state. The novella is permeated by tales of the Nameless Goddess, Anhutip, and the Two Lovers, which correspond to Anasuya's own line of questioning, but she doesn't make the connections between the “myths” she tells the people from the stars, and the patterns that represent her own world, the world of illusion, in Nirx's sthanas.

The seekers of the ineffable Nameless Goddess state that she is often attributed with a lack of characteristics. David Loy explains:

The nondual whole is 'spiritual' because the One Mind includes my mind, but *how* consciousness could be incorporated has not been explained. The world is not really experienced as a whole if the subject that perceives it is still separate from it in its observation *of* it. In this way the second sense of non-duality, conceived objectively, is unstable and naturally tends to evolve into a third sense. This third sense . . . must be understood as a negation. (25)

The Desert people are the esoteric explorers of nothingness, and “they say the desert is

riddled with hidden paths that the water takes[,] . . . little shortcuts through a greater reality” (Singh 73). The Desert people also attempt to cut through to an ultimate state. Anasuya is surprised that anyone would want to live constantly in a state of absence. Dick describes a static state as “the *absence* of something vital” (*Shifting Realities* 190). Anasuya does not yet connect the greater reality suggested in the sthanas with a static character. The narrator describes Anasuya entering the desert:

She wanted to taste the absence of water for the wonder of it [and] finds the narrow channel that she had been walking in had all been shaped by water. Absent now, but leaving its impress with mathematical elegance in the smoothness of the channels, the flaring of hard mineral through soft stone. . . . [Y]es, here there was water, but it was invisible. Then she discovered thirst. (Singh 43-44)

Anasuya seeks the opposite of her harmonic abundance. She explores this other channel that suggests absence, and she discovers desire again, for water no less, which throughout *Distances* implies a material that can flow and fit—an evolving material. Without reaching beyond the bounds of cognition, though, Anasuya can only recognize the outline or imprint of the pervasive self. The above quotation implies connections do exist in the desert, but that they are not apparent. Anasuya still exists in shared reality, but she has the additional ability of non-dual perception—a vision of the combined “god [and] not-god” (Singh 44). Water is Anasuya's origin, though, and represents that which flows to fit and form to any container. She is not a Desert person who “always find[s] water, even if they are dying in the desert . . . or rather, water finds them” (Singh 73). The Desert people have found truth within or as themselves, so they do not need to search for

it anymore. They are aware that living life is its own point. Furthermore, these followers of the Nameless Goddess “believe that the world is an illusion. The Nameless Goddess is a great illusionist. . . . So the paths and connections in this world aren't the only ones. Because this world is embedded in a greater reality. Which is the Nameless Goddess” (Singh 73). This cyclical nature is the paradoxical description of the “world [a]s neither totally real nor totally unreal. It is not totally unreal since it is experienced. It is not totally real since it is sublated by knowledge of Brahman” (Menon). The Nameless Goddess is an illusionist since she hides as well; to find her would imply losing awareness of her discovery because one cannot be cognizant of truth while experiencing it. The illusory world that the beings are aware of can similarly not be termed false as it is not only tangible but its tangibility can be considered. So although one reality is said to be ultimate, the illusory reality is empirically concrete, which lends it credibility as to its authenticity.

Since “the cross-fertilization” between maya and Brahman “is undeniable here” (Loy 67), we can move on to explore the symbol of water, or that which conforms to everything, suggesting the encompassing non-dual. Anasuya was born in the sea. In Sagara, “in the green, dappled light of the seaweed forest,” Anasuya “suspected that there were hidden patterns underlying the variegated splendor of the world . . . [and] the athmis came alive in her” (Singh 18). Not only is there the symbol of light indicating her budding awareness, but then appears her non-dual perception: the narrator explains that “the realization swept over [Anasuya] that everything in the world was in constant conversation with every other thing, that all was flux and play. Swimming in the green and gold light, she knew she would never be alone in such a world” (Singh 19). Again,



the light follows the dawning realization that life is meant to shift and change to allow for enjoyment, diversity, and exploration. She additionally mentions the feeling of connectedness to others, which although not becoming the one self, demonstrates her awareness of her connection with all else—her inherent collectivity.

Anasuya's origins are tied to her unique perception as “Sagara represents the world of philosophy and organic relation” (Banerjee 300). Organic in this way can be described as a “perception [that] is originally nondual” (Loy 61). Anasuya's “basic identity is [not] 'restored' by the mind flowing out through the senses” though; her awareness of life's harmonies and of her connection with others “does not generate immediacy but only destroys . . . 'imagined barriers” (Loy 61). This corresponds to Advaitic philosophy which states that it is ignorance (*avidya*) that is responsible for the division of self from not-self, so non-dual perception is merely removing this false distinction: “Advaita provisionally accepts the empirical reality of individual selves, mental ideas and physical objects as a cognitive construction of this natural state of ignorance” (Menon). Back in the story, Anasuya, in her excitement, runs to tell her mothers of her athmis' development and finds her voice in a poem: “Fish! . . . Fish fish! . . . Fish fish fish fish!” (Singh 20).

One of her mothers, Lata, tells her that her:

Poem is true . . . but it is only a small part of the greater truth. . . . So know this: that no poem we speak is ever a complete poem. No truth we can utter is ever a complete truth. Everything is what it is because of other things as well as its own nature. So there is no thing removed from other things. Thus you are Anasuya, but you are also the sea, and the fish, and

the athmis that is in us all. . . . [T]hus we end all poems with the phrase:

My poem is incomplete! (Singh 21)

These lines contain the dual, non-dual, and a fundamental reality. The world of duality is viewed here as the relationship of inherent signs and signifiers that bring objects or people their identity through language as each thing is identified by other things: “[y]ou can tell a fish by the shape of the water that closes around it as it swims. All we are is impressions on the water, ripples in the sea. All we are—circles, feedback loops, cycles of the seasons, of being and becoming” (Singh 25). The categorization that is inherent in thought construction is comparable to the ignorance inherent in maya. The only possible expressions of self, then, are quantifiable, so any expression of self that cannot be described is then ignored. Anasuya is a hybrid, a collective of origins as she “always exists in between” (Banerjee 300), and the athmis is that which connects her to all in non-dual perception.

*Distances* thus posits that beings have identities that are not expressible (esp. in closed systems) while those that are articulable are generally composed of multiple disparate elements formed by an individual's environment. To complete the poem would mean existing in lone selfhood in which there can be no poem, only pure being or “the ontological reality beneath [time's] flow” (*Shifting Realities* 217). Accessing non-dual perception means removing “the veil of ignorance” and recognizing the connections between all things in the world through the awareness of the suggested infinite state. To exist infinitely is described as a type of death in the empirical world. Since this fundamental reality has always been there, the individual's “consciousness is . . . restored,” which “is true only from the empirical standpoint; from the transcendental

perspective there has never been any barrier or delimitation” (Loy 61). This would mean:

For absolute reality to reveal itself, our categories of space-time experiences, our basic matrix through which we encounter the universe, must break down and then utterly collapse. . . . By 'world' we mean nothing more or less than Mind—the Immanent Mind that thinks—or rather dreams—our world. . . . In Brahmanism, we would say that a great cycle has ended and that Brahman stirs and wakes again, or that it falls asleep from being awake. (*Shifting Realities* 218-19)

Singh goes on to depict another way in which the world was created. In this one, part of a collective initiated existence in the depths of Sagara's ocean where “the old ones . . . still dream on the ocean bed. . . . They spend their lives in endless contemplation . . . and give back . . . even as they lie like great, drowned islands, their wide mouths seaweed fringed, ever open, like caves” (Singh 25). Here the dream symbolism denotes the dreaming up of the world of illusion (maya) by the infinitely “mutual dreaming” (*Shifting Realities* 216) who perpetually manifest it. David Loy explains, “we' must actually be perceiving (or 'experiencing') Brahman all the time, although we are ignorant of it” (66). Infinite, experiential reality is glimpsed in *Distances* through the character of Vara, whom Anasuya sees at times in the amnion, and eventually sees as a reflection of herself as the mutually dreaming oneness in the stone city. Anasuya catches the suggestion of Vara in the amnion as the space of the sthanas contains black portions indicating absence. She also sees Vara reflected in the city of human desires and passions, since such a place hints at its opposite, absence—the empty desert canals that only leave the imprint of pure existence in Anasuya's unifying perception. Vara permeates Anasuya's very being, but

she is described as voiceless, illusory, and vague about the one request she makes of Anasuya which is to create art.

Anasuya recognizes herself in Vara, which is interesting when compared with the concept of one thing suggesting its adverse in the Advaitic tradition. It is in the stone city where Anasuya begins to recognize herself reflected in Vara. Whereas in Sagara, the athmis grants different perceptions to different beings: some beings exist closer to limited or open perception, while others exist in a completely experiential state.

Anasuya's first lover, Hasha, “couldn't stop dreaming of what lay beyond the known world” (Singh 23). He desires to reach “truth,” which in Advaitic philosophy has the “twin criteria” of “non-sublatability and foundationality” (Menon). Near the story's end, Anasuya reflects on how Hasha explored the underwater caves before leaving completely with a man from the dream or world of illusion (the city). The cave story imbedded in *Distances* implies boundaries around empty space, that space which is described as “without qualities” (Menon) and thus is attributed with a complete lack of anything. Hasha finds “the place where there is nothing at all, and only enough water to see your face in” (Singh 106). The cave is complete nothingness, loneliness, so the return to variety and diversity through being thrown back into the illusion, or perhaps choosing to live the illusion as it is a more visceral experience, is a cherished homecoming.

The original myth of the cave which Anasuya ponders in *Distances* tells of a man who enters a cave and finds he cannot escape. He hears “[y]ou must climb out of this cave and return to the sea, or you will stay in this place for eternity, alone” which “woke him up” (Singh 105). He finds himself on the beach and realizes that he had grown old and sick, “and what his body needed was the peace death brings” (Singh 105). His people

then release him into the sea where he drowns and “there at last were the great bulks, the waiting, open mouths, the tendrils that came snaking out toward him, drawing him in, accepting him, taking him home. He opened his eyes” (Singh 106). This myth suggests that after the man is released from the coils of reality, he returns to truth (opens his eyes from the dream).

Anasuya's poems progress with her understanding of the intricacies of the harmonies of life, as she is taught by Lata, and her budding awareness of the ever-present true self:

Raindrops on still water.  
 Circles, ever expanding.  
 Only the Great Proportion  
 Stays the same.  
 If the circle were to spread  
 Across Sea and Earth and Sky  
 Would the Great Proportion remain?  
 It remains the same and yet  
 It contains infinity  
 .....  
 My poem is incomplete. (Singh 24)

Anasuya cannot express the inexpressible through language, and her poem must have its incomplete completeness. Her ability to see connections and the understanding she gains from this perspective on the world are being charted through her artistic capabilities. As she moves toward appreciating her own world, she is physically pulling away from the

space in amnion. Her skin begins to turn brown and she starts to lose her perception of harmonies. As she loses what she believes to contain her identity, she learns to better appreciate the beauty of her world outside the amnion and those who comprise it.

Anasuya first *felt* connected to others by the system of her athmis, but now she uses her memory of the harmonies of life combined with existing in the illusion, and she begins to *experience* life. She cognitively regards the world with appreciation while actually taking chances without mathematical understanding.

To further highlight the encompassing of all in non-duality through the symbol of hybridity, the narrator gives a “tale [which] tell[s] the opposite” (Singh 26). As opposed to the static “immobile” (25) beings on the ocean bed who in “their slow dreaming” (26) create the diverse, external beings, “the sea creatures mated with [the humans] and gave them the athmis” (26). In return, the humans gave the sea creatures their abandoned sky vessels that lay at the bottom of the ocean like a small mountain range, forming the reef [they] know today” (Singh 26). Sagara is the connected world, and “the sap of the people of the sea also called vapasjal . . . is returned to the sea and returns to the person so that in its signatures the person may read the sea's tongue and take part in its endless conversation” (Singh 26). As all types of sea beings have different states of awareness with their athmis; all these separate states also form the larger whole to signify the athmis as non-dual perception. The ultimate recognition of the non-dual that the sea people as a population comprise is expressed in singular parts. Sea beings like Hasha are on the spectrum of duality, not realizing they are “part of the great system of interlocking circles [whereas] Anasuya . . . knew the sea was within her” (Singh 26). Singh has created multiple levels of perception on which to demonstrate the indissolubility of disparate

parts in the whole and how the parts are necessary to allude to the whole.

The symbols of light and meditation are used by many non-dual philosophies to imply awareness:

A mystical light at the end of a meditative tunnel. . . . [W]e glimpse it in what is normally expressed by the term *creativity*. Nondual thinking is the source of the creative process, which does not 'explain' creativity but rather explains why creativity is so essentially mysterious. Many examples could be given of the emphasis on the egoless spontaneity of Asian art and literature. (Loy 151)

Anasuya is literally exploring non-dual space while experiencing her own personal creative awakening as she finishes her work of art at the same time as she finishes mapping the sthanas. The creative discovery of Anasuya's life goes along with the realization of her part in the manifestation of life.

Singh uses parables and myth structures throughout *Distances* to parallel the tenets of non-dualistic Indian philosophical tales—those of awareness, play, illusion, and truth. Singh's cultural background allows her to not only draw from the most basic of non-dual Indian philosophical tenets, but to “weave new myths for the new planet that deliberately use symbolic language to reinforce the central theme of the story . . . constantly allud[ing] to Hindu myths and philosophical concepts to ground the story within the Indian” philosophy (Banerjee 301). Through Singh's hybrid perspectives from her background in India and her life in the U.S., she uses her own unique voice to demonstrate the concept of non-duality. In one example, she embellishes on the myth of the gods mentioned earlier, Ekatip and Shunyatip. Suparno Banerjee notes,

The binary nature . . . of the twin gods Ekatip and Shunyatip . . . are associated in the story with exclusivist thinking as well as the birth of mathematics. 'Eka' and 'shunya' in Sanskrit mean 'one' and 'zero'—the two building blocks of binary mathematics, which originated in ancient India.

(301)

Singh highlights dualistic thought, a fundamental state that can only be suggested, and the containment of both in the non-dual through her use of Advaita Vedanta and myth. Singh creates new myths in her worlds to explicate a fresh outlook on reality, one that parallels a non-dual philosophy.

Anasuya tells Nirx “The Tale of the Two Lovers,” where Ekatip and Shunyatip existed in perpetual play and “took the forms of men and women according to their whim, and found all different ways to join together in love” (Singh 74). Ekatip and Shunyatip transcend gender binaries and *play* here “means that the self is completely absorbed . . . in which case the self and its activity are nondual” (Loy 111). Then the gods discover “the secret of Number, which they kept hidden in a cube made of bone. This magic cube gave them the power to count, to draw maps and to make sense of the world” (Singh 74-75). The cube's three dimensionality hints at a connection to the sensory world. As these two lovers existed solely as the non-dual collective, they now had the vision of separateness too, but the Nameless Goddess personified as wind came, and the two lovers were pulled toward a dark cave. Within the cave, they were enticed to make love to a gorgeous woman “who was none but the Nameless Goddess herself” (Singh 75). It is the Nameless Goddess here who not only represents the pervasive and mysterious, but we find her calling the combined lovers into her cave. The cave, as previously stated,



represents the infinite and so is depicted as lacking characteristics—an ideal place in which to find the elusive goddess. Shunyatip then hides the magic cube within his mouth, and the Nameless Goddess is not able to find it as they all make love. In the heat of the orgy, another god enters and “when it was all over they found that the stranger was the lesser-god Anhutip himself” (Singh 75). The god of illusion (Anhutip) enters the orgy and Shunyatip attempts to hide the cube that grants gods the Secret of Number. It is important to once again remember that dualism is marked by this compartmentalization and enumeration of things. The story continues that when Shunyatip eventually pulls the cube from his mouth, he finds,

That what he held in his hand was a stone. . . . Immediately the two lovers realized that Anhutip must have stolen the cube in the middle of the orgy and exchanged it with the stone. . . . So they decided that they needed to peer into the past to see at what point Anhutip had stolen the cube, and into the future to see where he might have hidden it. . . . They did not notice when Anhutip . . . crept close to them and retrieved the stone[;] . . . all he had done was to change the appearance of the cube to look like a stone. (Singh 76-77)

The secret that the two lovers were granted from the perfection of their non-dual play makes them able to completely view the world as separate parts. The original world of complete non-duality where they existed before the disruption from the other gods was suddenly given the view of separation, in the end only possessed by Anhutip, the creator of reality. This separates the two lovers from the view of all the parts of the whole and the whole as well. It also is described as triggering the disappearance of the Nameless

Goddess, thus suggesting they have integrated into her. Now, while awareness of non-duality offers a perception of harmonies, it cannot view separation, “god from not-god” or completeness “the Nameless Goddess” as separate: “nonduality is [an] experience in which there is no such distinction between subject and object. However extraordinary this and counterintuitive such nonduality may be” (Loy 25-26).

Dick states that perception of pure awareness of a supreme reality is distinguished “from that which the rest of us like to imagine we enjoy [by] the element of time” (*Shifting Realities* 176). Brahman is “an endless now” which “can't be escaped” (*Shifting Realities* 176). Anhutip is described as “breath[ing] out the world as it is now, in all its diverse splendor” (Singh 78). Anhutip gives birth to reality as it is known, thus he is the god of this reality, the god of illusion. Whereas Brahman is infinite, so it encompasses maya, but it also pervades maya, so Brahman cannot be distinguished from maya in non-duality. In maya though, if any awareness of the hint of Brahman is achieved, ignorance through the filter of the mind distinguishes this immanence from the individual, experiencing self. Singh is able to address everything with her new myths, including the paradoxical scenario of non-dualism encompassing all, including Brahman, and Brahman pervading constructed reality as well as the non-dual sphere. The narrator tells the reader that when people ask “why the Nameless Goddess doesn't come out and tell everyone the truth. . . . [H]er followers point to her contrary nature and her love of solitude . . . she hates settlements, civilization, order” (Singh 78), hinting again at the paradoxical nature of Brahman and its complete detachment from worldly concerns. Brahman is the only reality that cannot be sublimated, and is therefore not represented by the order that false reality creates through arbitrary categorization.

The reflection of self in *Distances* is represented in the face of Vara, the apparition Anasuya sees within the amnion as she explores the new sthanas, which ultimately prove to represent the organic world all around Anasuya. While mapping the mathematical space of the sthanas, she discovers the face of Vara: “at the end of each session, Vara appeared with reassuring regularity. It seemed to Anasuya that the . . . urgency in Vara's eyes was slowly eased with each meeting. . . . Anasuya felt that some intangible thing was being transferred to her from Vara each time” (Singh 64). As Anasuya gets closer to her discovery of the sthanas, she feels the immediacy releasing as she integrates more fully with oneness (not simply perceives it). Interestingly, Anasuya then goes to meet her pentad of lovers. In this state of passionate bliss,

[She] senses . . . in the tangle of lover's limbs, [in] the aromas of wine and food and passion, something forming, nothing more than a shadow, a memory, of a woman's face in her mind. Vara is a presence, a witness, looking out of the windows of Anasuya's eyes. . . . [S]he is dissolved out of being, into being. (Singh 57)

Vara is the dreamer; Vara is Anasuya; Vara is the ultimate self, a background to Anasuya's empirical reality. Anasuya catches glimpses of herself as part of the oneness that dreams up the illusion of reality. This portion is also written in present tense where most parts are in past, revealing a sense of immediacy or immanence.

Vara requests that Anasuya *create*. As creativity has ties to non-dualism, Anasuya creates within the non-dual space of the amnion to access Vara or Brahman. Anasuya “felt that if she could create this work of art, she would be able to answer who or what was Vara” (Singh 80). Anasuya senses that when she maps the sthanas of Nirx (the

creation of reality) and finishes her great artistic creation for Vara, that “the confluence of the two mysteries. . . . [E]nlightenment [would] come to her at last, but right now she could only imagine it or dream it” (Singh 66). Brahman is over and over again defined by this criteria: it can only be suggested or *dreamed*. Vara tells Anasuya that she has “no time . . . [so t]ake an empty space and create something in it” (Singh 83). So on the suggestion of the endlessly present Vara, Anasuya creates. Anasuya searches for the unknown, but learns to prize instead the known world (that which is permeated by Brahman, rather than living as purely Brahman), ultimately returning to her mates. Through only a hint at Vara, a reflection of her true self, Anasuya recognizes the value in the diversity of the city. After finishing her creations, both mathematical and artistic, she loses her mathematical capabilities, her ability to see connections, but she regains her appreciation for life outside the amnion. At the story's close, Anasuya is given love and compassion by her mates, the ultimate gift and reason, she discovers, for living, which requires no magical powers, and no *athmis*. Further, there is a binary of mathematical and artistic confluence represented by these metaphors, which amounts to a hybrid of balanced aspects—the creation space and the definable world of phenomenal reality. Singh never forgets the totality. Anasuya's discovery of the truth of the *sthanas* also leads to fear in the character of the Temple Master.

The Master, who provides some role as a figurehead for the Temple in which these mathematical wanderings take place, is a creature that Anasuya greatly fears. She describes him as having a nervous and suspicious nature. He is truly a mystery in Anasuya's world. After Anasuya discovers the mathematical and artistic patterns in the amnion, the Master tells Anasuya, “[s]o I have lived to see this. . . . This is what I was

waiting for! . . . Oh, what you have done to me, Anasuya!” (Singh 133). The Master cannot bear to know what he suspected all along: that there is nothing greater than the world he currently lives in. The deeper truth is that his reality is what the immanent god, himself in effect, wants for him. It is too much for the Master to bear as he is attached to his suffering and pain in the life he experiences. He takes the pessimistic view of truth, like Absdensen's wife in *High Castle*. Truth has not freed him, rather it has frightened him, and so he kills himself and attempts to poison the rest of the staff. Anasuya does not recognize the sthanas’ significance, even after she discovers them. She does not yet see that the black spaces are portions of the sthanas of Nirx. The Master's actions further confuse her, and it requires her forced return to the city for Anasuya to finally appreciate life, perhaps still unaware of why she appreciates it.

As Nirx's equations develop more and more black space and Anasuya loses her *athmis*, she slowly becomes blind to harmonies, “losing the mathematical sight that made her what she was” (Singh 111). This is when she proclaims her mathematical and artistic creations complete. Anasuya turns a brown color and integrates into the other anonymous wanderers in the city to better “understand . . . the harmonies of the mind, the soul that holds the *athmis*” which “would [truly] be a great thing!” (Singh 115). Anasuya has ultimately decided to live in the world of illusion: “her mind felt jagged and broken, pieces of thoughts and impressions floating into her consciousness like chopped up geometries” (Singh 149). She will not only have understood the beautiful connectivity of the non-dual, but will also attempt to enjoy and understand the ebb and flow of the world around her through the suggestion of her infinite self. Anasuya has accessed the totality of life, perhaps for the worse as she has exposed the great secret: “she saw then what she

had done, in its fullness. Opened not only the doors of heaven, but the gateways to the children of the sea” (Singh 149). But for all her fears, she discovers the purpose of her world and her place in it as she returns to her mates who still love and accept her: “the City lay like a luminous flower, lights turning out to greet the dawn. The house was somewhere there, in the distance. They turned steps toward it” (Singh 152). The lights turn out, indicating that Anasuya’s glimpse of awareness was fleeting. Its purpose remains in the glints of joy in her present reality, and she finds her ultimate home in those she loves.

*Distances* is an ideal example of the interplay of the main philosophical tenets explored in this thesis. Singh creates a world of intertwined realities existing simultaneously, most representing multiple philosophies themselves, or containing parts of the larger whole that completes non-duality. Singh embraces hybridity as,

*Distances* 'seems made up entirely of divergent forms, foreclosing any possibility of . . . purity.' . . . Thus, at a wider level, these 'divergent forms' on the planet, their interaction with and disconnection from each other, and their various interpretations of . . . ancient myths reflect the 'multiple identities' and resultant dislocations characteristic of [the non-dual Indian philosophical tradition]. (Banerjee 300)

Singh actually frames her sf in the realms of non-dualism. She explores and maintains a philosophical perceptive state for her character implying a different norm. Anasuya's *athmis* inadvertently aided her in her appreciation of the natural harmonies, and the messy, sloppiness of existence.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

This thesis stresses that sf allows the reader to access worldviews different from their own and imagine other possible realities. This allows the individual to view reality in a more comprehensive way and recognize that each person is entitled to his or her own personal views and identity. Non-dualism expresses a preference for a diversity of desires while stressing the importance of flexibility: “[d]o all you do, acting from the core of your soul. . . . As life lives on for its own sake, needing no reason for being, so the just man has no reason for doing what he does” (Loy 112). *The Man in the High Castle* and *Distances* are somewhat utopian as they direct humanity toward a way of behaving for a perfectly diverse world, the only perfection which can be achieved in flawed reality—the path which is open to those willing to expand their awareness of reality.

Dick states, “[l]et's live in the present and for the future, not dwelling neurotically on the outrages of the past” (*Shifting Realities* 11). The *Tao Te Ching* asks the reader to examine what *is* as well, as opposed to only what may be. Dick's choice of including the *Tao Te Ching* and *I-Ching* within *High Castle* is apt as they delve into what always *is*, but goes unnoticed (a primordial connection in tune with, and thus capable of shaping, reality/nature). The Tao is described as “hidden but always present” (*Tao Te Ching* 4) and “always present within” (*Tao Te Ching* 6). Dick questions the authenticity of reality and the bounds of cognition. Dick utilizes the philosophical concepts of Taoism to

representseeming distinctions present in the world of duality as an illusory expression of the mind, while maintaining the suggestion of a perfectly unified state.

*Distances* explores multiple worlds with varied perceptive capabilities. Singh uses theoretical physics and new mythologies based in Advaitic philosophy to interweave complex realities within one another. She, like Dick, creates a world where almost anything is imaginable, yet ends with the truth that reality requires acceptance more than change. Singh depicts Anasuya's discovery of herself through her loss of what she believes represents her identity; instead she finds that the love and acceptance of others offers her life meaning. Also, as Anasuya loses her boundaries to complete visceral existence, she accesses a wealth of appreciation for her new world.

*High Castle* and *Distances* directly confront different forms of cognitive ability. These works seek new definitions for the absence and dynamism in non-dualist philosophy. They further imply that there is nothing inherently good or evil in the world, but structured, with the possibility of being reconceptualized. Within a shifting society, habits can be untaught and new ideals can be implemented. Such a vast re-imagining of society requires an almost global agreement and personal accountability over systematic ethics. People must desire change themselves so that it is not temporary. Dick and Singh demonstrate that “the order and patterns of the world are meant to be discovered, experienced, and celebrated. To ask what they are for is a meaningless question, because they simply are” (Singh 96). The ultimate aim of this thesis was to discover the beauty highlighted in illusory reality as represented through non-dualism in these science fictions. In the *The Man in the High Castle* and *Distances*, Dick and Singh create worlds



of exploration, acceptance, and appreciation for their characters and depict non-dualism as a heightened awareness of reality.

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## VITA

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